CHAPTER V

THE TODAS OF SOUTHERN INDIA

105 IN the south of India, from 11° to 12° north of the equator and from 76° to 77° east of Greenwich, rise the Nilgiri Hills. Though individual peaks reach an altitude of nearly 9,000 feet, the Nilgiris form, in the main, an undulating table-land about 500 square miles in extent, ranging from 6,000 to 7,000 feet above sea level. The tropical climate of southern India is here greatly modified by the altitude. The mean annual temperature is only 58° F.; the thermometer rarely rises above 70°, and frosts occasionally occur on cold winter nights. The heavy precipitation of the monsoons nourishes the vegetation of the grassy prairie and forested valleys; from December to March, however, comes a dry season, during which the grass is parched. The plateau is singularly isolated from the rest of southern India. On every side the land falls away precipitously 3,000 to 5,000 feet to the plains below, and the steep slopes are covered with a dense, malarious, and almost impenetrable jungle where tigers, leopards, deer, and other animals abound.

The most interesting inhabitants of this plateau are the Todas, a pastoral tribe of buffalo herders. Their culture, though unique, reveals certain points of similarity with that of the Nairs and other peoples of Malabar, and this may indicate a common origin. Nevertheless, they have certainly lived in isolation in the Nilgiris for a very long time. They preserve no traditions about the prehistoric cairns which dot the hills, and their culture was already fully differentiated when they were first visited by a European, a Portuguese missionary, in 1602. Attracted by the salubrious climate, the Europeans in southern India began, about 1820, to retire to the Nilgiris for relief during the hot season. After 1850 they

came in considerable numbers, founding summer colonies at Ootacamund and other towns. They introduced venereal disease, from which the natives have since suffered severely. Today, however, the population of the Todas—about 800—is again slowly increasing.

The Todas speak a Dravidian tongue, akin to the languages of their neighbors. They frequently employ archaic or secret words and expressions in their ceremonial and in the presence of strangers. Though they possess no written language, they are able to count into the thousands. Time is reckoned according to a calendar with twelve months of thirty days each and a week of seven days.

Racially, the Todas differ markedly from their neighbors. They are lighter in complexion—the men a rich brown and the women still lighter. Their hair is thick, black, and wavy. The men, in contrast to the other peoples of India, have thick coarse beards and extensive hair on the body. Tall in stature, the men average five feet seven inches, the women six inches less. Other physical characteristics include a narrow head (cephalic index 73 to 74), a long oval face, brown eyes, a prominent nose of medium breadth (nasal index 75), and moderately full lips. The men are athletic and robust. One man seventy years of age, for example, used to walk fifteen miles to market in the plains, returning the same day to the hills, an ascent of 3,000 feet, with a heavy sack of grain. The young women with their bright eyes and ringlets of raven hair are sometimes distinctly pretty (see Fig. 31), but they rapidly degenerate in appearance. One observer describes the Todas as a race of superb men and hideous women.

Four other tribes also inhabit the Nilgiri Hills. The Badagas, who number about 34,000, and the Kotas, with a population of 1,200, share the plateau with the Todas, while two wild tribes, the Kurumbas and Irulas, occupy the encircling jungle-clad slopes. The mutual relations of these five tribes present an interesting example of an intergroup division of labor. The Todas practice no agriculture and few indus-

trial arts. They devote nearly their sole attention to their herds of buffaloes, supplying the other tribes with dairy products in return for various goods and services. The

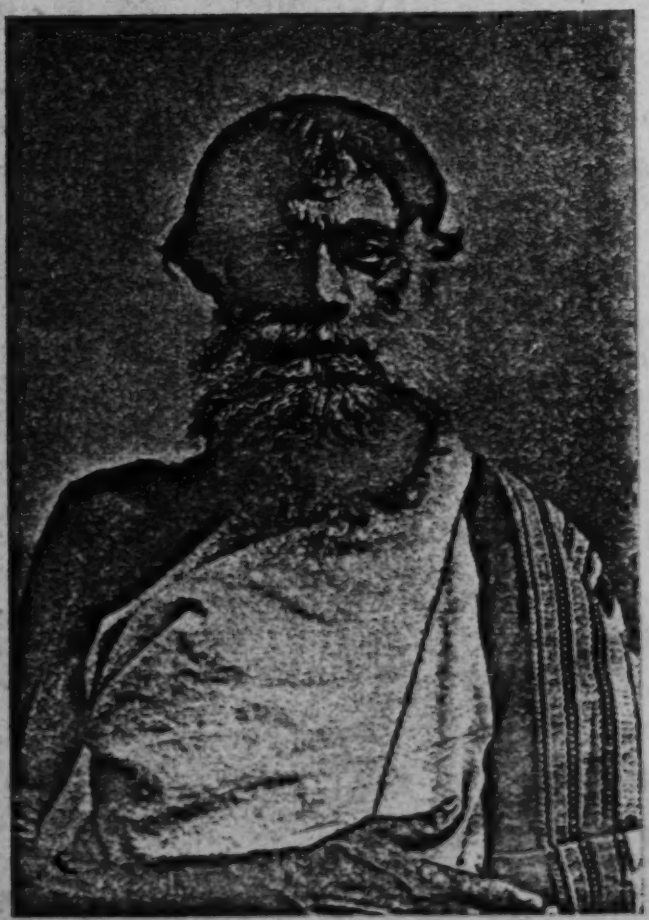

FIG. 28. A TODA MAN.
From Rivers, *The Todas*

Badagas, a predominantly agricultural tribe, provide their neighbors with grain and other farm products, and act as middlemen in the trade with the peoples of the lowland. They pay an annual tribute of grain to the Todas, partly

105 because the latter are considered the original owners of the land, partly from fear of Toda sorcery, and partly because it is immemorial custom. The Kotas, though they practice a little agriculture and possess a few buffaloes, are primarily an artisan tribe. They make and supply to the other tribes most of their pottery and ironware. They also provide the Todas with music and certain ceremonial objects, receiving in return the flesh of all sacrificed buffaloes as well as various dairy products. The Todas believe implicitly in their own superiority over all other peoples, and they regard the Kotas as definitely inferior. The Badagas, however, they treat in general as equals. The relations of these three tribes with the Kurumbas and Irulas are much less intimate, though the latter furnish certain forest products. Between all the tribes, however, complete peace prevails. War is absolutely unknown. The Todas, indeed, do not even possess weapons, save for degenerate clubs, bows, and arrows which survive in certain ceremonies.

The material culture of the Todas is surprisingly meager. Inasmuch as they neither till the ground, hunt, fish, nor wage war, they possess no tools or weapons for such purposes. They manufacture neither pottery nor textiles. They have knives and axes for cutting firewood, utensils of earthenware and bamboo for cooking and dairy operations, and brooms, sieves, and grain pounders for household purposes, but most of these articles they obtain from the Kotas. They generate fire by means of a simple fire-drill. Thorns serve them as needles, and leaves as dishes and drinking cups. Their fine arts are as undeveloped as their industrial processes. Decorative art is confined to simple adornment of the person and clothing. Occasional playing of the flute and the composition of songs for ceremonial events exhaust the musical attainments of the tribe. Their dances are rudimentary and confined to funerals. In general, the arts have been overshadowed by ceremonial.

The Todas clothe themselves in coarse cotton garments

obtained from the Hindus through the Badagas. Both sexes wear a loin cloth and a long loose mantle or cloak thrown over the shoulders. The latter garment has a capacious pocket and is frequently embroidered. The men also wear a perineal band supported by a string about the waist. Head and feet are commonly bare. The women wear their hair in long ringlets, the men in a thick mop cut evenly at a moderate length. Children have their heads shaved at the sides and

FIG. 29. TODA DWELLING.

top, leaving locks of hair before and behind. The women load themselves with ornaments of gold, silver, and brass—earrings, bracelets, armlets, necklaces, waist circlets. The men commonly wear silver rings and gold earrings, formerly also silver chains around the neck. Adult women are tattooed on the chest, shoulders, and upper arms. The men usually reveal raised scars on the left shoulder—the result of piercing with a hot stick as a magical cure for fatigue from milking. Circumcision is not practiced. The Todas paint the face very sparingly, the body not at all, but they smear themselves with ghee (the native butter), which soon becomes rancid and gives off an unpleasant odor.

Architecture is almost the only art at which individual Todas have become specialists. The ordinary dwelling resembles in shape a half of a barrel which has been split longitudinally. The side walls are merely a continuation of the curved roof; both are of thatch fastened with rattan to

105 curved bamboo rafters. They project some distance beyond the end walls, which are constructed of solid planks. One end serves as the front of the dwelling. Here a tiny entrance with a sliding door gives access to the interior. The atmosphere inside is usually intolerably stuffy, since a fire is kept constantly burning in the fireplace with no provision for the escape of the smoke. Raised platforms of earth, smeared over with a thick layer of dry buffalo dung, serve as beds. A hole in the center of the floor, where the women pound grain, divides the house into two portions; the women confine their domestic activities to the rear, while the men carry on their dairy operations in front. A village consists of from one to six such huts, usually situated at a slight elevation near a wood and a stream, and surrounded by a stone wall with openings large enough to admit a man but not a buffalo.

With the exception of a few cats, the Todas possess no domesticated animals save their buffaloes. These animals, a particularly fine variety of the common water buffalo of India, are tended exclusively by males. They graze by day, watched by boys, and are penned up at night. They are driven from place to place at different seasons, partly to secure better pasturage and partly to fulfill certain ceremonial obligations. The cows are individually named and their pedigrees remembered—only in the female line, however, for no attention is paid to breeding and no importance is attached to paternity. The bulls are unnamed and held in comparatively low esteem. Male calves are usually sacrificed or given away to the Kotas; a few only are retained for breeding. The Todas distinguish two classes of buffaloes—sacred and ordinary animals. The ordinary buffaloes are tended by the boys and men of the village without special ritual, and their milk is churned in the dwelling house. The sacred buffaloes, however, are tended by special dairymen alone, their milk is churned in special dairy buildings, and their care is surrounded with an elaborate ritual. Moreover, they are subdivided into herds of varying degrees of sanctity,

each with its own dairies, its own ritual, and its own class of dairymen. 105

The dairies associated with the sacred herds are usually situated at some distance from the villages, preferably adjacent to a separate water supply. Near each dairy is a circular inclosure for the buffaloes at night, a smaller pen for calves, and usually a small building for very young calves. The great majority of dairies resemble houses in architecture

FIG. 30. CHURN AND DAIRY UTENSILS OF THE TODAS.

except that they are surrounded by higher walls. A few very ancient and sacred dairies, however, are circular in shape with high peaked conical roofs. A partition divides the interior into two rooms. In the outermost, containing a fireplace and two beds, the dairyman sleeps and receives his friends. In the inner room, which he alone may enter, he performs the dairy operations and keeps, each in its special place, the various dairy utensils.

The principal dairy operations, milking and churning, are performed twice a day—in the early morning and late afternoon. The buffaloes are milked outside the dairy. In the bamboo milking vessel is placed a little whey from the previous churning, in order to cause a rapid coagulation of the

105 milk, for the Todas make little use of fresh milk or cream. The milk coagulates before the cream is able to rise—the morning's milk by evening, the evening's milk by the next morning. It is then churned in an earthen pot by means of a stick rotated by a cord. Churning separates the coagulated milk into a liquid part, whey, and a solid part, which may be called "butter" although it differs from our butter in containing the casein as well as the fat of the milk. The "butter" is heated over the fire and clarified by the addition of grain, which sinks to the bottom of the vessel along with the proteid constituents of the milk, forming a deposit which is a staple article of the Toda diet. The remaining liquefied portion, containing the fat of the milk, forms ghee or clarified butter, another staple product.

The Todas subsist solely on dairy and vegetable products. Except in a single ceremony, they never eat the flesh of their buffaloes. Nor do they eat any other meat with the single and rare exception of the sambar deer. They make considerable use of wild berries, thistles, nettles, and bamboo shoots, and they obtain grain and vegetables from the Badagas either in the form of tribute or by purchase. Their favorite dishes include rice boiled in milk or whey, vegetable broth, rice and jaggery (crude sugar) boiled in water, and a kind of curry. Millet is roasted and pounded, mixed with whey and jaggery, rolled into large balls, and eaten with ghee or honey. Whey is the usual drink; there are no native intoxicating liquors or other indigenous narcotics or stimulants. The men do the cooking and eat before the women. The Todas take two principal meals a day; they break their fast between nine and ten o'clock in the morning and dine between seven and eight in the evening. They are modest about allowing others to observe them eating—from fear of the evil eye.

The tribe is divided into two endogamous divisions or moieties, which in some ways resemble castes, although there are no restrictions against their mutual intercourse.

108 They reveal minor divergences in dialect and ceremonial, but they chiefly differ in the fact that the Tarthar division owns all the higher sacred herds and dairies while the Teivali division alone furnishes the sacred dairymen who tend them. The Tarthar division, which is much the larger, considers itself superior. Each moiety is subdivided into a number of exogamous clans, which are territorial rather than totemic in nature. The Tarthar division contains twelve clans; the Teivali, six. The clan is further subdivided into families. Expenses incurred by the clan as a whole, notably for the repair of dairies, are equally distributed among its constituent families, irrespective of their size or wealth.

The ownership of property may be vested either in the individual, in the family, or in the clan. Individuals hold title to clothing, ornaments, household possessions, and the like, never to land. Buffaloes, whether sacred or ordinary, are usually the property of individuals or families, though the highest of the sacred buffaloes, the *ti* herds, are owned by the clan as a whole. Houses and the smaller villages belong to the family. Land and the chief villages with their dairies are the common property of the clan, whose members migrate from one village to another at different seasons. The inheritance of property is patrilineal, *i.e.*, in the male line, and it always follows legal descent, which does not always coincide with actual paternity. The legal sons of a man either share in common or distribute equally the money, ornaments, and household possessions which he leaves behind. Grandsons inherit the portion of a deceased son. Daughters receive a dowry from their parents, but inherit nothing. If the sons continue to live together, as is customary, they hold their inherited buffaloes in common. If they separate, however, the buffaloes are equally divided except that the eldest and youngest receive an extra animal each; odd buffaloes after such a division are either sold and the proceeds distributed or taken by one son who recompenses the others. Debts are also inherited. Sons

105 must pay off the debts of their deceased father; in default of sons, the brothers must settle.

Each family has a head, who is responsible for the collection of its share in clan expenses. The clans possess informal headmen, who owe their positions to their personal qualities and lose them with sickness or old age. The tribe as a whole, however, has no chief. Its sole governmental institution is a council (*naim*) of five members. Seats in the council are privileges held by certain families in particular clans. One member is chosen from a Teivali clan, and three are similarly drawn from Tarthar clans. The fifth member is a Badaga, who usually sits, however, only in cases involving the relations of the two tribes. The council concerns itself chiefly with civil disputes between clans, families, or individuals, and in such cases a representative of each party sits with it. It also possesses wide powers in regulating ceremonial. A strong member frequently dominates the council either by the force of his personality or by the exercise of bribery or intimidation. The council has no voice in criminal cases. Indeed, crime seems to be absolutely non-existent. There is no recorded case of a theft or a murder by a Toda. On occasion, to be sure, a Kurumba is killed for sorcery, but this is regarded, not as murder, but as an act of self-defense. Certain acts which we consider crimes, *e.g.*, infanticide and adultery, are not so regarded by the Todas. Other acts, especially ritual offenses against the dairy, are viewed as sins rather than crimes. This striking respect for law simply reflects in one direction the extreme subservience of the people to ancient custom and tradition.

The Todas adhere to a classificatory system in reckoning kinship. Thus the term "father" includes not only one's actual or legal father, but also one's paternal uncles and all other males of the father's clan and generation, as well as the husbands of one's maternal aunts. "Mother" similarly embraces one's maternal aunts, other women of the same clan and generation as one's mother, and the wives of one's

various "fathers." "Son" and "daughter" are equally inclusive terms. Differences of age play a rôle in the terms for brothers and sisters, those older than oneself, those of the same age, and those younger being distinguished. Otherwise, however, these terms are equally inclusive. "Elder brother," for example, includes all older men of one's own clan and generation. A cousin, therefore, will commonly be called "brother" or "sister." A special term (*matchuni*), however, is used for "cross-cousins," *i.e.*, the children of a brother and sister as opposed to the children of two brothers or of two sisters. A man should normally marry his cross-cousin, *i.e.*, the daughter either of his father's sister or of his mother's brother. Cross-cousins of opposite sex call one another "husband" and "wife," whether or not they are actually married, for they are potential spouses. The term "father-in-law" (*mun*) is applied also to a mother's brother and to the husband of a father's sister, for with cross-cousin marriage such persons are potential fathers-in-law. The terms for mother-, son-, and daughter-in-law have a similarly broad connotation. The Todas, though they follow a true classificatory system, have nevertheless advanced one step in the direction of a descriptive system. Thus the son of one's own sister is distinguished from the son of one's clan or classificatory "sister" by calling the former "*my* sister's son" and the latter "*our* sister's son."

This system of kinship affects social life in several ways. At certain ceremonies, notably funerals, kinsmen of various degrees have definite duties to perform. Again, kinship may involve taboos. Thus a man may not mention the name of his several "fathers-in-law" and "mothers-in-law." Moreover, relatives when they meet must observe definite forms of salutation. Though these are usually verbal formulas, a woman must salute an older male relative by kneeling and raising his foot to her forehead.

Descent is patrilineal. In other words, a child belongs to the clan of its father. To the Todas, however, fatherhood

105 does not mean physical paternity but a legal relation established by a ceremony performed when a woman has reached the seventh month of pregnancy. The legal "father" of the child may or may not be the actual father. Indeed, he need not even be a husband of the woman, for if she is unmarried or her husband is unable to attend to the matter, another man may perform the ceremony and thereby become the "father." For the actual ceremony, the man and woman retire into the woods with certain relatives. The man cuts a niche in a tree, places in it a lighted lamp, fashions a crude imitation bow and arrow, promises the woman a calf, and presents her with the bow and arrow according to a definite ritual. She raises the toy weapons to her forehead and gazes at the lamp till it goes out. Then he cooks a meal; they eat together and pass the night in the woods. This ceremony must be performed during a woman's first pregnancy; thereafter it is performed only when it is desired to change the fatherhood of her children. Thus it happens that a man may become the "father" of several children after his death. But for a child to be born without benefit of a bow-giving ceremony constitutes one of the worst scandals of Toda society.

An expectant mother observes one other important rite. At about the fifth month of pregnancy she secludes herself for a month in a special hut at some distance from the village, submitting to certain ritual acts when entering and leaving. Childbirth itself, however, involves no special ceremonies, and any interested party may be present. A woman skilled in midwifery attends the mother, who kneels with her head on her husband's chest. Prayers and ritual acts facilitate a difficult delivery. The umbilical cord is cut with a knife, and the afterbirth buried. Unwanted children, especially girls, are suffocated at birth and buried like a stillborn child. The preponderance of a hundred males in a population of 800 reflects the prevalence of female infanticide, which is, however, declining today. If twins are born, one is killed.

even if both are boys; if both are girls, they are both killed. 105

Shortly after childbirth, the woman retires once more to the seclusion hut, where, with ceremonies similar to those on her previous visit, she remains for approximately a month. Until a child is three months of age, its face is covered as a protection against the evil eye. Then, in a special ceremony, it is uncovered. Shortly thereafter, in another ceremony, the child is given a name and its head is shaved. The sexes receive different names, commonly derived from such things as prayer words, gods, hills, villages, dairies, buffalo pens, dairy vessels, and stones. Each individual also has a nickname, usually given by the Badagas with reference to some personal peculiarity. In addition to the current name taboos, the Todas show a certain reluctance about uttering their own names and an even greater reticence about their nicknames. A man may change his name in certain cases, *e.g.*, if illness or some other misfortune befalls him.

Children are born about three years apart on an average. They are suckled for two years or more, though after the naming ceremony mother's milk is commonly supplemented to an increasing extent by a gruel of boiled millet or rice in warm milk. Parents display much fondness for their offspring and look indulgently upon their games with wooden buffalo horns and little imitation buffalo pens. Neither adoption nor formal puberty rites prevail. In the case of boys, however, an analogous ceremony involving the piercing of the ears must be performed before a sacred dairy office may be held. It may take place, however, at any time from infancy to adulthood.

Todas are usually married during childhood, sometimes as early as two or three years of age. The father of a boy selects a suitable girl and arranges matters with her parents. The wedding takes place at the house of the bride, with a simple ceremony involving the presentation of a loin cloth as a bridal gift. Thereafter the groom is expected to present

the bride twice a year with a loin cloth or, after she reaches the age of ten, with a mantle. These garments, small and cheap at first, gradually become larger and more valuable. The family of the groom must contribute a buffalo—now more commonly a sum of money—to the funeral of any member of the bride's family who dies. The child-bride, who continues to live at her own home, submits shortly before puberty to defloration by a man of another clan. To defer this ceremony until after puberty is a disgrace which will stigmatize the girl the rest of her life. When she reaches the age of fifteen or sixteen, she receives a dowry of clothing and ornaments and is conducted by her husband to his home, where she is inducted into his clan with a feast but no ceremony. Either party may annul the marriage at this time, the groom by payment of a single buffalo, the bride by paying a heavy fine of five, ten, or even more buffaloes. In either case the groom receives back any buffaloes previously given as funeral gifts.

The Todas observe a number of restrictions with respect to marriage. They never intermarry with non-Todas. The orthodox union is that with a cross-cousin, but in any case a man must marry a woman belonging to another clan in his own division, for, as noted above, the divisions are endogamous and the clans exogamous. Even though they belong to proper clans, however, persons may not marry if they fall within certain prohibited degrees of blood relationship. Thus a man, though he may and should marry his cross-cousin, may not marry an ordinary or parallel cousin, a cross-cousin of his parents, or a woman who would be a cross-cousin of his children. These restrictions, it should be noted, apply only to marriage, not to extramarital relations.

Though monogamy is not uncommon, and sporadic cases of polygyny occur, the prevailing and characteristic form of marriage among the Todas is fraternal polyandry. When a woman marries a man, she automatically becomes the wife

of his brothers, living or as yet unborn. They all live together with little jealousy or friction. One brother gives the bow during the wife's first pregnancy and thus becomes the legal father of her children, though the others are also considered fathers. When one brother is with the woman, he places a staff and mantle outside the door of the hut as a warning to the rest not to enter. In rare instances the husbands are not brothers, but even in such cases they are usually clan brothers. If they live in different villages, the wife usually visits them in turn for a month at a time, but disputes not infrequently arise. One husband gives the bow at the first pregnancy, and the first two or three children belong to him and his clan; then another husband performs the ceremony, and so on. Toda polyandry is unquestionably connected with female infanticide and the resulting scarcity of women. Even with the decrease of infanticide, however, the custom does not seem to be dying out. What ordinarily happens is that a group of brothers takes two wives instead of one. Even where different brothers take individual wives, they clearly hold them in common. 105

A man may divorce his wife on the grounds that she is lazy or a fool, not, however, for barrenness or adultery. He pays her family a fine of one buffalo and receives in return any buffaloes he has given as funeral contributions. It is a reproach to be a widow or a widower. If a woman survives all her husbands, she may either return to her parental home with her children, live with her grown sons or a married daughter, or remarry. If she remarries, her new husband must make a payment of buffaloes to the children of his predecessor. The death of a woman, in a community practicing child marriage and infanticide, is a serious matter. It leaves a man or several men without a wife and with no woman available to marry. Toda custom provides for this situation by permitting widowers to purchase a wife from another man. They obtain the consent of the woman, her father, and her husband or husbands, and pay the latter a

105 number of female buffaloes fixed by the council with reference to their ability to pay. The wife is then transferred with a feast and ceremony. The majority of cases coming before the council arise from this practice, especially today, when abuses have crept in and any man who desires a woman seeks to have her transferred to him, even without her consent or that of her husband.

Though members of the opposite divisions are forbidden to intermarry, a special form of union is permitted between them. Sometimes a Teivali man and a Tarthar woman, for example, live together as man and wife, their relation differing from an actual marriage only in the fact that their offspring are regarded as the legal children of the woman's legitimate husband or of some other man in her own division who has performed the bow-giving ceremony. More commonly, however, the man simply visits the woman from time to time as her recognized lover, after obtaining the consent of her husband or husbands and undergoing a ceremony in which he makes them handsome presents.

Great laxity prevails in sexual relations both before and after marriage. In addition to her various husbands and recognized lovers, a woman may have authorized relations with certain sacred dairymen and others, not to mention more casual unions which, though not socially sanctioned, are nevertheless not frowned upon. There is, in fact, little restriction of any kind upon sexual intercourse, even between members of the same clan. As Rivers says, "the Todas may almost be said to live in a condition of promiscuity." They possess no word for adultery, and even the concept itself is totally alien to them. "Instead of adultery being regarded as immoral," says the same classic authority, "immorality attaches rather to the man who grudges his wife to another."

Women occupy a definitely subordinate status in Toda society. With a few minor ceremonial exceptions they may not approach or have anything to do with the buffaloes and

dairies. They are rigidly excluded from all political, religious, 105
magical, and most ceremonial activities. They suffer at times, as when in the seclusion hut, from a stigma of uncleanness like that of a corpse. And they labor under other

FIG. 31. A TODA WOMAN.
From Rivers, *The Todas*

disabilities. For example, they must leave the village during certain ceremonies, and they may not use certain paths, especially those trodden by buffaloes. In spite of their distinct inferiority, however, they are not treated with cruelty or contempt, and they enjoy a considerable measure of personal freedom. Their low status may possibly be corre-

lated with their slight contribution to the economic life of the tribe. The men, in addition to their political, religious, and ceremonial functions, do the herding, milking, churning, fuel gathering, building, trading, and cooking. In the absence of agriculture and important domestic arts, the female share in the division of labor by sex is confined to such comparatively minor activities as fetching water, mending and embroidering clothes, pounding and sifting grain, sweeping the floor, and cleaning the furniture and household utensils with dry buffalo dung. There can be little doubt, at least, that female infanticide and polyandry represent an adjustment to this unequal distribution of industrial activities between the sexes. It is not surprising, moreover, that the Toda women, in view of their circumscribed lives and interests, have been described as markedly less intelligent than the men.

Recreation finds little place in the life of the Todas. To be sure, they derive considerable amusement from some of their ceremonies, and they enjoy visiting, but true games are few and little indulged in. In one game, a boy or man tries to crawl through a narrow tunnel of stones before another, starting with a handicap, can touch his feet. Another game resembles tipcat; a pointed piece of wood is propped against a rock, struck with a stick by one person, and caught at a distance by another. The Todas also occasionally hold lifting and jumping contests, and they are fond of riddles, but they have no mechanical puzzles or string figures.

Sickness may have various causes, prominent among which are sin, sorcery, and the evil eye. It bodes ill, for example, to be told that one looks well or that one's buffalo gives much milk. Indigestion, a common effect of the evil eye, is cured by a special class of medicine men, who rub the belly of the patient, put salt on his cloak, stroke the salt with a thorn, and burn the salt and thorn with an incantation. The same specialists treat headache, snake bite, and other ailments by

similar rites and formulas. When seriously ill and expected to die, the patient is dressed up in jewels and finery to await the end. Occasionally an individual who has unexpectedly recovered may be seen strutting about proudly in his funeral raiment. 105

The Todas hold two funeral ceremonies for their dead. In the case of children, the second takes place on the same day as the first. With adults, however, it is usually postponed for several months or a year, and is often held for several persons at the same time. Kinship ties play a prominent part in determining who shall perform certain acts in the funeral ritual and who shall make contributions of buffaloes, money, and other necessary accessories. The chief mourner is a man's brother or son, a woman's husband, or a child's father. At the funeral of an unmarried boy, a female cross-cousin plays the rôle of wife and widow, and the usual pregnancy ceremonies are always performed in connection with the funeral of a girl or a childless woman. The Kotas participate by furnishing music and certain ceremonial objects, receiving in return the flesh of the sacrificed animals.

The first funeral is held, in the case of men, either at a dairy or at a special hut symbolically called a "dairy"; in the case of females, at a hut which similarly represents a house and is later burned. Thither, on the appointed day, the corpse is brought on a wooden bier. There follows a series of elaborate rites, including especially a sacrifice of buffaloes and a ceremony of cremation. The slaughtered animals—now limited by the British Government to two at a funeral—are dispatched to provide the deceased with a source of livelihood in the next world. The buffaloes selected for the sacrifice, infuriated by goadings, are caught in an exciting contest by the young men of the division opposite to the deceased, who rush at them, seize them by the horns, hang on their necks, and bear them to the ground. As the captive animal, smeared with butter and decorated with a sacred bell, expires from a blow on the skull, the corpse is brought up to its head. Every one weeps and laments in characteristic Toda fashion

105 —in couples, forehead to forehead—but whether they mourn the deceased or the buffalo is not certain. The funeral pyre is lighted from a fire generated by friction. Before cremation, however, the corpse, the pocket of its mantle filled with food, money, ornaments, and other gifts, is swung thrice over the flames, then temporarily removed and the valuables thriftily extracted and redistributed to their donors. A lock of hair and a piece of the skull, rescued from the ashes, are wrapped in a bundle and kept in state in the chief village of the clan until the second funeral. Those who have attended the funeral, or have come into contact with the corpse or the relics, are rendered unclean. They refrain, especially if they are younger relatives of the deceased, from mentioning his name. The widow or widower, in addition, cuts his hair, covers his head, and observes a number of food taboos.

The second ceremony repeats many of the rites of the first, including an even more lavish sacrifice of buffaloes, and adds a number of new ones. Within a circle of stones, after an elaborate introductory ritual, the relics, anointed with butter, are burned along with certain vessels, implements, and other articles of a ceremonial nature. The ashes are buried and covered with a stone. A man encircles the spot three times, ringing a bell and shattering a new pot on the stone. All salute the stone, break their fast, and cut off a lock of hair as a token of mourning. At the time of the next new moon, certain ceremonies of purification are held to cleanse contaminated persons and places.

After the second funeral the soul of the deceased, which has hitherto haunted the earth as a malignant ghost, departs for Amnodr, the spirit world in the west where the sun shines while it is night on earth. Here the dead Todas lead a life much like that on earth. They tend their buffaloes and dairies—free, however, from rats and other destructive animals. Curiously enough, as they walk about, their legs gradually wear down, and when only knee-length stubs remain, they are reborn into the world as new individuals.

Of superior spirits or gods, the Todas believe in a vast number. Invisible and somewhat vaguely conceived, they are reputed formerly to have inhabited the Nilgiri Hills and later to have retired to the summits of the hills, where they now live with their spiritual buffaloes and dairies. They intervene in the lives of men to punish sins and inspire divination. The Toda gods are not totemic, though each clan has its patron divinity; they are not the ancestors of men, though a few are deified heroes; nor are they personifications of the forces of nature, for there is not even a sun god. The outstanding deity, though by no means a supreme being, is the goddess Teikirzi, the divine ruler of this world. She instituted the characteristic customs of the Todas, but did not create buffaloes and men. The latter task fell to her younger brother, Ön, who now lives in and rules over the realm of the dead. Ön brought forth from the earth 1,600 buffaloes, the ancestors of the sacred herds, and the first man made his appearance clinging to the tail of the last buffalo. From one of man's ribs, woman was created. This original pair reproduced so rapidly that within a week there were already a hundred Todas.

Though they pay scant attention to omens, the Todas have faith in divination. To ascertain the cause of a misfortune, such as sickness, the burning of a dairy, or the death, disease, or drying up of a buffalo, they consult a special class of diviners, who are quite distinct from the medicine men. These specialists, who usually operate in pairs, frequently work themselves into a semi-hypnotic frenzy, during which they speak an alien tongue and are thought to be directly possessed or inspired by the gods. In this state they are able to reveal the cause of the misfortune, which is invariably either sorcery or sin, and to indicate the remedy.

The power of sorcery is transmitted in certain families, and its practitioners are distinct alike from the medicine men, the diviners, and the dairyman-priests. A sorcerer usually exercises his magical powers only against persons who have

105 deceived him or quarreled with him. If, for example, a man has given him an evasive or deceitful answer to a request for assistance, he obtains some human hair, binds five small stones together with the hair, wraps them up in a cloth, pronounces an incantation over them, and hides them secretly in the thatch of his enemy's house. When misfortune overtakes the victim, he resorts to a diviner and learns the identity of the sorcerer. He then goes to the latter with a present of food and grants the original request, whereupon the sorcerer utters a magical formula of recantation and removes the articles from the thatch. The hair employed need not belong to the victim; nevertheless, the Todas are careful to hide their hair and nail clippings. Other similar forms of sorcery prevail, and the Todas are feared by their neighbors for their proficiency at the black art. An exceptionally intimate association between magic and religion is revealed by the fact that both sorcerers and medicine men, instead of relying merely on "the belief in the efficacy of like producing like," make use of formulas which specifically invoke the gods and bear a marked resemblance to prayers.

A diviner may decide, however, that a particular misfortune is due, not to sorcery, but to sin. To the Todas, sins are ritual offenses against the sacred buffaloes and dairies, in which the gods have a lively interest. They include such acts as theft of milk from a dairy, entering a dairy after sexual intercourse in the daytime, and approaching a herd or a dairy after visiting a seclusion hut or a funeral, or even after chewing tobacco. But a man does nothing, however flagrant his sin, unless the gods manifest their displeasure. Only when and if a misfortune befalls him, does he appeal to the diviner, who then advises him to make a sin offering of a buffalo or a piece of cloth, depending on the gravity of the offense. He makes this offering, strangely enough, not to the gods or their representatives or the dairy, but to the other section of his own clan, each clan being divided into two sections for

the sole purpose of satisfying this ceremonial requirement. A man may also make atonement by dedicating a buffalo to the gods. Instead of sacrificing or giving away the animal, however, he actually vows to do neither; he keeps it until it dies a natural death and meanwhile uses its milk. 105

Sacred days play an important part in Toda religion. Not only does every ceremony have its appropriate day, but each village observes once a week a special rest day, when certain activities are taboo. On these days, for example, women may not leave or enter the village and its inhabitants may not bathe, wash their clothes, clean the household furniture with dung, hold a feast or a funeral, or sell or otherwise dispose of any object in the village. The Tarthar clans, in addition, celebrate a special dairy day each week, with similar restrictions. In spite of the fact that these taboos are frequently evaded by subterfuges, the Toda rest days resemble in many respects an embryo Sabbath.

The outstanding characteristic of Toda religion, however, is the extraordinary emphasis placed on ritual. Worship has become formal; divorced from the ideas which originally inspired it, it survives, buttressed by the immense prestige of custom and tradition, in the form of an elaborate and often meaningless ceremonial. Ritual permeates every phase of the life of the tribe. We have found it in the ceremonies attending pregnancy, name-giving, marriage, and death. It reaches its highest development, however, in the conduct of the sacred dairies.

The dairy is the Toda temple. When a man visits a strange village, he first goes to its dairy, prostrates himself at the threshold, and utters a prayer. The sacred dairies fall into several classes, each associated with a particular grade of sacred buffaloes. They range in sanctity from the village dairies to the venerated *ti* dairies, the highest of all, and the elaborateness and complexity of their ritual varies with their sanctity.

Each class of dairy with its herds is tended by a special

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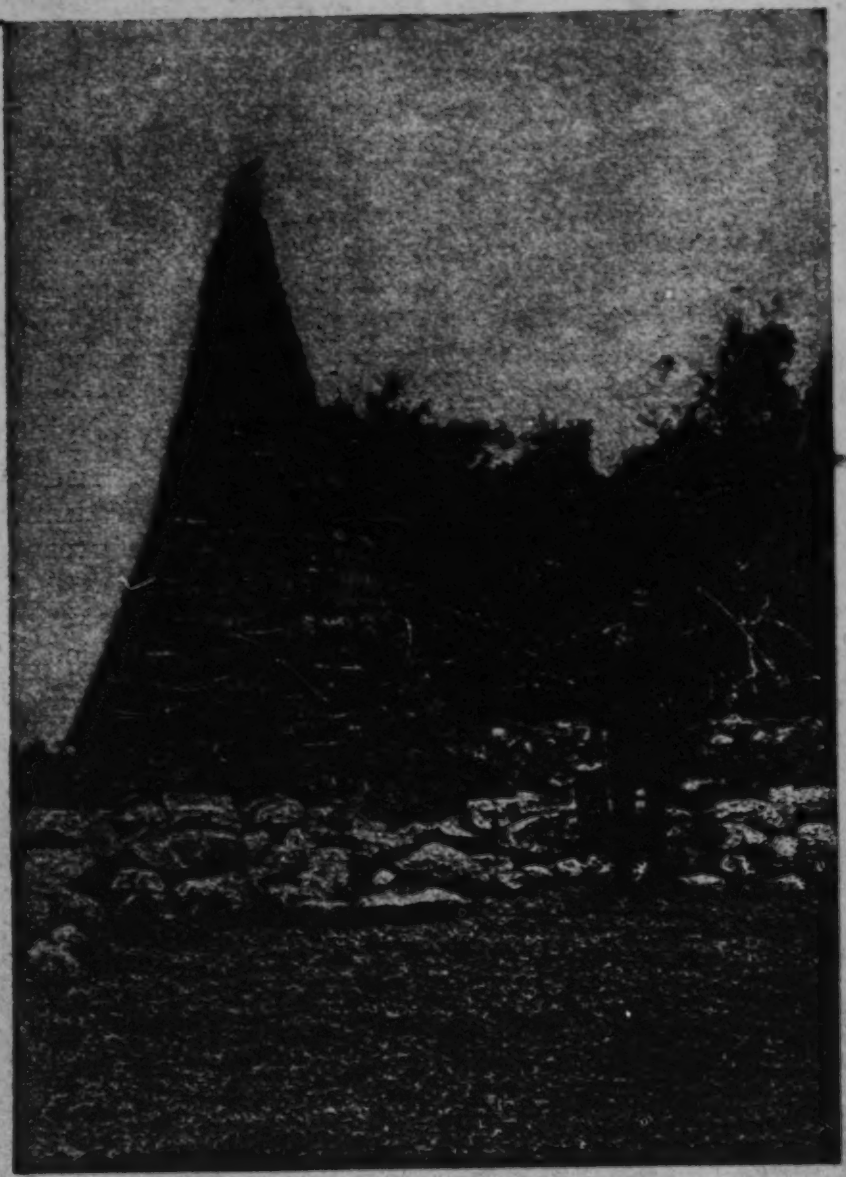

FIG. 32. A SACRED TODA DAIRY AND DAIRYMAN
From Rivers, *The Todas*

class of dairymen, the priests of the Todas. The assumption of the office of dairyman involves elaborate ceremonies of initiation, varying in complexity with the sanctity of the dairy. Thus to become a *palol*, the sacred dairyman of a *ti*, a man must first pass a qualifying ceremony, in which, naked, he receives food from an old Tarthar woman who has never had intercourse with a man of her own clan, and then undergoes an ordination ceremony, lasting nine days, in which at various stages he drinks water from the leaves of a sacred tree and rubs his body with the bark—in accordance with a belief in sacred numbers—three times seven, seven times seven, and nine times seven times. Thus he acquires a high degree of ritual purity, which enables him to come into contact with sacred things. He must maintain this purity by keeping stringent rules of diet, sleeping, and dress, and by observing a variety of taboos. He must not, for example, cut his hair or nails, cross a bridge, attend a funeral, transact business in person with the outside world, or associate with a woman, even his own wife. He submits to these restrictions chiefly because of the profits he derives from the sale of the products of his dairy. If he serves his full term of office, eighteen years, he performs a ceremonial act which under any other circumstances would be considered highly immoral, namely, intercourse in the daytime with any Tarthar woman of his choice. None of the dairyman-priests exercises any governmental influence, nor are they ever consulted on mundane matters; their sanctity is purely ceremonial.

In the daily conduct of his dairy operations, the dairyman must follow a definite procedure, each minute detail of which is prescribed by custom. The daily routine of the *palol*, for example, begins at 5:00 A.M., when he rises. On stepping outdoors, he salutes the sun with his hand to his forehead. He washes his hands and face in a special vessel in front of the dairy. Then, taking water in his right hand, he pours it into his left hand and thence conveys it to his mouth, which he rinses. He ties up his hair in a prescribed manner, bows at the

threshold of the dairy, and enters, reciting a formula. After transferring fire from the ordinary fireplace to a sacred fireplace, he doffs his cloak and dons a special loin cloth. Reciting a prayer, he kindles three special pieces of wood at the sacred fireplace and with them lights the lamp. Still praying, he touches with a particular bamboo stick the three special vessels containing the milk drawn the previous evening. Placing a special wand against the wall, he begins to churn the coagulated milk in the middle vessel. Soon he pauses to "feed" the sacred bell, *i.e.*, to smear milk on it, repeating a sacred formula three times as he does so. And so on through the day. Space is here lacking for more than a sampling of such minutiæ, but the same complex and elaborate detail characterizes all Toda ritual.

Among the prominent features of the dairy ritual are the important part played by special utensils, bells, lamps, and other sacred objects, and the rigid separation maintained between the vessels and other articles which come into direct contact with the milk and those which come into contact with the outside world or with the finished products of the churning. Underlying the ritual seems to be the idea that the dairyman is dealing with a sacred substance. The sanctity of the buffaloes, apparently much greater formerly than now, seems to have been transferred to their milk. If, as appears probable, the sacred animals were not originally milked, the ritual may well have been developed as a prophylactic against the evils to be expected from the profanation of a sacred substance, in short, as a means of removing the taboo.

Prayer plays a prominent rôle in the dairy ritual. Toda prayers contain no direct invocation of the gods. They consist of two parts: an enumeration of the sacred objects (*kwarzam*) for the sake of which they are uttered, and a recitation of the blessings prayed for. The latter portion, considered much the less important, is frequently omitted. Since the *kwarzam* are frequently unintelligible, prayer is in

the process of being reduced to seemingly meaningless ritual words. 105

The daily ritual by no means exhausts the ceremonial of the sacred dairies. New vessels introduced into the dairy must be purified by an appropriate ritual. Salt is given to the buffaloes several times a year in a special ceremony. Elaborate ceremonies attend the seasonal migrations of the buffaloes from village to village, probably in order to counteract the evil involved in conducting the sacred animals through the profane world. The procession moves in a definite order, the vessels are transported on poles in prescribed positions, stops are made for prayers, and the new dairy is purified according to a special ritual. At a ceremony held when a calf is fifteen days old, the people partake of the milk of the sacred buffaloes, which is ordinarily taboo to them. This suggests a sacrament of communion. If an especially sacred pot, which is buried in the buffalo pen, is broken, stolen, or tampered with, or if a foreigner enters the dairy or a dairyman uses tobacco, an elaborate ceremony must be held, involving the consecration of a complete new set of dairy utensils, the ordination of a new dairyman, and the purification of the dairy. At a notable ceremony, held annually or oftener, a young calf without blemish is ceremonially sacrificed, dismembered, roasted, and eaten—the only occasion on which the Todas ever eat the flesh of the buffalo. The basic idea, as in the ritual eating of the totem animal among the Australians, seems to be that the sacrifice of one animal will promote the welfare and increase of the rest.

This overemphasis on ritual, thinks Rivers, indicates a state of degeneration in religion, in which the underlying ideas and beliefs have become atrophied, with the result that the worship originally based upon them has become formal and largely meaningless. "The study of the Toda religion makes it seem to me most probable that the Todas came to the Nilgiri Hills with a religion of a higher order

105 than they possess at present, with a developed system of gods who were believed to direct and govern the affairs of men, and that by a long and slow process these gods have become unreal, the supplications of the people for their guidance and assistance have become mechanical, and worship has been transferred from gods, not to stocks and stones, but to bells and dairy vessels."

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